

awarded in a sex discrimination case. Perhaps the case most indicative of his feeling for the citizens though was his dismissal of charges against people camped in protest in Lafayette "Protest" Park. He said they were exercising their rights under the First Amendment.

Judge Richey's courtesy in the court was legendary. He used gender-neutral terms when discussing certain statutes mentioning only men. Despite his own strict Methodist upbringing, he gave witnesses options on oaths containing no religious references and dispensing with the Gideon Bible. One said of him, "Judge Richey is tough as shoe leather, but fair minded almost to a fault."

We shall all miss this man. He leaves behind an unparalleled judicial legacy and record of public service.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, the American people are fed up with the IRS and its tactics. They are calling for change. Today I have taken a first step to help. I am joining as a cosponsor of S. 365, the Internal Revenue Service Accountability Act, which was introduced by my distinguished colleague from Georgia, Senator COVERDELL.

The IRS is in disarray from its top management all the way down to its field offices, and American taxpayers are paying the price for that disarray—a price in inefficiency, in inconvenience, in intrusiveness, and even in harassment. It is not fair for American taxpayers to fund an agency that is wasting their money and time. It is time to clean up the IRS. It is time for a change.

The IRS Accountability Act puts a tight rein on the IRS and its agents. It makes IRS agents personally accountable for their actions and subjects them to criminal prosecution if they abuse their authority by harassing taxpayers. The bill makes it a crime to release information from tax returns without proper authority. It restricts the ability of the IRS to conduct audits. It ensures that the IRS will abide by court decisions against it. And it ensures that taxpayers have a chance to correct any honest mistakes on their tax forms without incurring a penalty.

American taxpayers are honest, hard workers. They do not deserve an overzealous agency with its agents tormenting and harassing them. It is time to make the IRS more accountable for its actions.

This bill is an important first step toward protecting Americans from a Tax Code that is unfair, restrictive, punitive, and complicated. We need to do more. We need to completely overhaul our Tax Code to make it flatter, fairer, and simpler. We need to look at all options as we tackle this issue, but we must make sure that a new Tax Code eases the burden for families and busi-

nesses and encourages, rather than inhibits, growth, investment, and savings. That should be our top priority.

That is our task for the coming months and years. But until we can successfully meet that greater challenge, the very least we can do for the American taxpayer is to get the IRS cleaned up and off the taxpayers' backs.

The time has come for tax relief. The people of the United States have had enough. They want less government, less regulation, and less taxes. And they want less hassle and harassment from their Government. The IRS Accountability Act is a good start. As we approach tax day, April 15, it is only appropriate that we take a bold step toward fixing the IRS.

The time for change is now.

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF CENTRALIA, IL, MINING DISASTER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to memorialize 111 miners from the town of Centralia, IL, who died nearly 50 years ago on March 25, 1947, in one of the worst coal mining disasters in U.S. history.

On that day, 142 men were working in mine No. 5 of the Centralia Coal Co. Only a few minutes remained before the end of their shift when there was an explosion in the mine. The blast raced through the tunnels beneath the town of Wamac on the southern edge of Centralia, leaving debris and poisonous fumes in its wake.

Thirty-one men managed to escape, but 111 of their coworkers were trapped 540 feet underground. For 4 days, rescuers worked to save them, but they could not reach the miners in time. In a tragic discovery, the searchers found notes next to some of the miners' bodies that they had written on scraps of paper and cardboard as they lay dying. "Tell Dad to quit the mine and take care of Mom," wrote one miner. "Tell baby and my loving boys good-bye and I am feeling weak. Lots of love." Together, the men left behind 99 widows and 76 children under the age of 18.

But the real tragedy for Centralia was that the disaster could have been prevented. As early as 1942—and continuing right up to the time of the explosion—State and Federal inspectors warned about dangerous conditions at the mine. In fact, when the blast occurred, the latest State and Federal reports were thumbtacked to a bulletin board outside the mine's wash house.

While the inspectors found numerous safety violations, they were particularly concerned about the combustible coal dust which was so thick that it would collect in the miners' shoes as they worked. The miners themselves knew how dangerous the dust could be, and more than a year before the disaster, four of them sent a letter to Illinois Gov. Dwight H. Green warning that it might explode one day. "This is a plea to you," they wrote, "to please save our lives, to please make the De-

partment of Mines and Minerals enforce the laws at the No. 5 mine, before we have a dust explosion."

But neither the governor nor Federal officials nor the Centralia Coal Co. took any significant action. Investigators later determined that one of the main causes of the explosion was the dust the miners had feared.

Three days after the disaster, Governor Green ordered State inspectors to close all unsafe coal mines. In Washington, Congress held hearings and launched an investigation. But for Centralia, IL, it was too late.

As we near the 50th anniversary of this disaster, our thoughts are with the people of Centralia and the families of those who lost their lives. We are reminded that too often, we react to disasters rather than taking steps to prevent them.

The greatest tribute we can give to the Centralia mine explosion victims is to ensure that critical worker safety and health protections are not weakened or destroyed. We must be vigilant in our efforts to make sure workers don't risk their lives simply by going to work.●

JUNETEENTH INDEPENDENCE DAY

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to pledge my support for the commemoration of June 19 as "Juneteenth Independence Day." This day marks a significant occurrence in American history, a day every American should reflect upon and remember.

Mr. President, June 19 is a day when all African-Americans were finally liberated from the bondage of slaveowners. Although President Lincoln signed the revolutionary Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1865, many slaves were still denied their lawful freedom. It was not until June 19, 1865, that all slaveowners officially recognized and abided by the dictates of the Emancipation Proclamation.

For too many years, African-Americans were denied basic rights and liberties that today all Americans enjoy. I stand here today, 132 years later, to express my view that this shameful aspect of American history should never be forgotten. For these reasons, I proudly endorse Senate Resolution 11. This significant legislative endeavor reminds every citizen of the unspeakable horrors to which many of our fellow Americans were subjected. It is my hope that every June 19 from this year forward will be celebrated as "Juneteenth Independence Day." It also is my hope that this day will serve as a reminder, of our past and a bridge all of us can use to overcome our differences and unite as Americans.

Mr. President, I believe commemoration of "Juneteenth Independence Day" warrants support from all members of the U.S. Senate. As a cosponsor of Senate Resolution 11, I urge my colleagues to join me in officially recognizing this important day.●